

# TORAH AS FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION

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## Introduction

Education is as mature as man and language. After creation, God educated the first parents on what to be done orally. That is why the researcher really implores the instructor's statement that 'All education is religious but not all is Christian education.'<sup>1</sup>In a general sense David sees education as "the focus is on 'rearing' or 'nourishing' ... others include any process by which a person of any age grows in knowledge, awareness and life skills."<sup>2</sup>334.

From David's view education is an act of obtaining growth and skills of life. It is an act of meeting, acquitted, and obtaining knowledge that makes one fit in a given society. That is why illiteracy is a great disease as generally said. Lack of knowledge delays achievements and causes novice.

Meanwhile, this paper is focusing on education that is Christian from the perspective of Torah. It addresses education from Hebrew-Christian tradition committed to moral education to enable people to love and serve both God and neighbour.

### a. The Meaning of Torah

"Torah" is the Hebrew word for law. Its basic meaning is teaching or instruction. It denotes instruction focused on how one should live rather than on abstract or academic subjects. Lawrence adds "the basic meaning of the word is reflected in passages that speak of parents or the aged instructing youth."<sup>3</sup> 389. But Walter sees "Torah" as "word translated 'law' in the Old Testament... from the Hebrew verbal root, yarah, which means 'to throw' or 'to shoot.' The idea behind the word is to inform, instruct, direct, or guide. In Jewish tradition it is most frequently used to designate the text of the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch.... By the Greek, nomos-may refer to either the Mosaic legislation (Rom 7:14) or a broad behavioural principle (9: 31)<sup>4</sup> 2081. From Dorling's perspective law means "A rule enacted or customary in a community and recognized as enjoying or prohibiting certain actions and enforced by the imposition of penalties.... Laws collectively as a social system or subject...divine commandments."<sup>5</sup> 457-458.

Dorling's definition centres on general or secular mentality about what is acceptable and denied but Lawrence and Walter really dug into the meaning of law or "torah" as instruction, direction, and guiding. It means instructing others,

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<sup>1</sup>Class discussion by Rev. Dr. Babatunde on 9th July 2007, ETSI.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Atkinson New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 334.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence O. Richards Encyclopedia of Bible Words (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 389.

<sup>4</sup> Walter A. Elwell Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 2081.

<sup>5</sup> Dorling Kindersley Etal. DK Illustrated Oxford Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 457-458.

so it is manifested between two people that is the instructor or teacher and the pupil.

From these definitions cited above, it could be deduced that the words “torah,” law , decree, ordinance, judgment, precepts, are synonymous for they all connote the same thing from brother outlook. Also Pentateuch used by Walter referred to documents that contain the torah or law which can also be called “torah.”

### **b. The origin of Torah**

“Torah” was given by God through his servant Moses. Walter authenticates that “from the beginning God’s law lay at the centre of his dealings with human kind.... The law that God gave through Moses had many aspects for example, civil dealing with legal system of the people of God considered as a state”<sup>6</sup>675. law in Israel was God’s law, mediated through Moses. Even the word “law” denotes the body of commandments given by God that is why it is called the law of the Lord (Luke 2:23-24, 39). Also it can be called the ‘law’ of Moses because it came through Moses to Israel, he was the writer.

### **c. The Recipient of Torah**

Torah was given to a particular nation which is Israel. Joel affirms that “... Law was the means by which the people of Israel attained their covenant relationship with God.... God has chosen them and necessary as the means by which the promises attached to the covenant would be actualized.”<sup>7</sup> 451.

The nation Israel as a centrifugal received the law in order to reach the whole world with God’s expected made of life\ living, “Torah” as the foundational for Jewish tradition which stands as the basic root of understanding the prophets or the Scriptures. By Israel’s very nature it could not develop an adequate moral and cultic system to please God due to the fallen state of man. Because of the people’s hardness of heart God had to reveal; His will by giving the law.

### **d. The Purpose of the Law**

God gave the law to form a basic or culture of His chosen people and to reveal His demands and will to man. It serves as a guide to worship, a personal guide to good family and social relationship, the basis for determining civil and criminal cases. The law was a great gift of God to Israel, for it was their key to the experience of God’s best. Law was designed to teach each generation of God’s people how to live so that they might experience in their days the blessings that God promised will be provided at the end of history.

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<sup>6</sup>Walter A. Elwell Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 625.

<sup>7</sup>Joel B. Green Etal. Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 451.

Law was not given in order to condemn but as a guide and expected culture acceptable by God that if obeyed would produce benefits. The law was the teacher and the keeper of Israel. The law of God was his means of sanctification. It was given to transform, regenerate man into maturity. The given of it was to pilot the chain of relationship between the Creator and the creature, it was to establish a dynamic way of life in which one continually seeks God's kingdom and his righteousness, also to make Israel closer to God. John contributes that "The law prepared the way for the coming of Christ .... Made for the lawless."<sup>8</sup> Law was given to meet a need that existed within the context of the covenant.

#### e. The Torah

Walter says "This God's revelation had many rules and restrictions relating to debt and credit in Israel."<sup>9</sup> 605. But what are these rules, decrees and ordinances? These laws can be divided into various means.

- I. Cultic laws or humanitarian or civil regulations or book of the covenant. This is found in Exo 20:22-23: 33. Most of it follows the casuistic formulation of cuneiform laws. If a happens, to will be the legal consequences it is protasis versus apodosis. The purpose of the covenant code was to exemplify and to set into motion the legal machinery by which Israel as a nation could reflect God's concern for justice, love, peace, and the value of life. This law deals with social and civil relations. It is of personal such as father and son, husband and wife, master and slave, and strangers, properties, seduction, witch, and so on. Pfeifer says "the sanctity of life is stressed by these laws against murder, kidnapping, and violence. God curbs the violence of sinful men by this sanction of strict justice. ... to the Hebrew there were no "accidents" in a world where God reigned supreme."<sup>10</sup> 71.
- II. Law of criminal focuses on offenses against God and offenses against man. This can be seen in the Decalogue. Offenses toward God centered on the first commandment to the fourth one. John summarizes this in this manner:

...Israel was to worship the one true God. Worshipping false gods would be setting up rivals to Him.... The worship of God must be spiritual, not material...the Israelites were not to use His name for any idle, frivolous, or insincere purpose... for selfish or evil purposes.... A day of solemn worship of God should be kept weekly.... This was not to be a day of slothful

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<sup>8</sup>John R. Kohlenberger III Etal Zondervan NIV Naves Topical Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 609.

<sup>9</sup>Walter A. Elwell Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 609.

<sup>10</sup>Pfeiffer F. Charles Wycliff Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 71.

inactivity but of spiritual service through religious observances.<sup>11</sup>

Any trespasses of these commandments warrant penalty mainly death. Offenses against man are from the fifth to the tenth commandments. Matthew commands by saying : "...duties we owe to our relations; those of children to their parents ...our own and our neighbour's life...our neighbour's chastity...wealth, estate, and goods ...good name .... Thou shalt not covet.... The foregoing commands implicitly forbid all desire of doing that which will be an injury to our neighbour."<sup>12</sup>95.

- III. Laws Judicial and ConstitutionIt focuses on the local judges, priests along with two witnesses to confirm the offence which then warrant punishment. Also royal power makes Hacket too declares the king's power limited by the law as written; "and formally accepted by the king: and directly forbidden to the despotic....Yet he had power of taxation, and of compulsory service, the declaration of war and so on."<sup>13</sup> Also the heads of the tribes seem to have had authority.
- IV. Ecclesiastical and Ceremonial Law. We have two divisions of these law which are (a) Law of sacrifice and ordinary sacrifices such as whole burnt offering, meat offering, peace offering and sin offering. There are extraordinary sacrifices such as consecration of priests, purification of women, cleansing of lepers, great day of atonement, and great festivals (Lev 2-23). (b) Law of holiness arising from the union with God through sacrifice, such as holiness of the whole people as children of God that includes dedication of the first born, distinction of clean and unclean food, provision for purification, laws against disfigurement, and unnatural marriages and lusts. We also have holiness of the priests and Levites in term of their consecration, spiritual qualifications and restrictions, them their rights and authority. Holiness of places and things such as the tabernacles with the ark, vail, alters, laver, priestly robes, holy places. Holiness of time as Sabbath, sabbatical year, year of jubilee, Passover, feasts of weeks, tabernacles, trumpet, and the day of atonement. Canon admonishes that "... as part of the law's righteousness, are to be faithfully rendered.... In all sheres of life God claims our first and best... God's highest due is that we be "holy":<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John F. Walfwoord Etal. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (USA: Victor Books , 1995), 139.

<sup>12</sup>Matthew Henry Commentary on the Bible (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1961), 95.

<sup>13</sup>William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: baker Book House, 1981), 1605.

<sup>14</sup> Canon F. W. Farrar. General Introduction to the Old Testament (N. I: NP. N.D), 195.

## **f. Torah and Education**

As a matter of fact, the law eventually becomes the life style of nation Israel and it forms their curriculum. God entered into covenant with Israel but made use of ordinances as a measuring rod for justification.

Coming from the etymological meaning of Torah, it is the facts and teachings that must be taught, instructed, and practised. God gave it as academic forum. We have the appearance of the instructions such as Moses, priests, Levites and parents while the students are the congregation, elders and children-The master instructs his slaves. Husbands enlightens their wives from oral method and even in a formal way.

We have the written law, in inquiring knowledge about God and personal life and neighbour is the law that must be written on the door post. Even prior to Moses there was law of nature which is line with Noachian commandments. The written law on the tablet given to Moses at Mount Sinai and the one dictated to him in Exodus 20 were examples of written law that be read to the people. Returning from Sinai, Moses read the law to the hearing of the Israelites and must be annually for remembrance and as a sign of signet to the covenant made.

Parents were enjoyed to write those laws at their door posts and teach their children. Priests taught the congregation or worshippers. The oral is also part of “Torah” that is why George buttresses this point that

No written law can be so exhaustive as to cover all the contingencies of life, and so the ritual and ceremonial, as well as the civil and criminal, law of the Pentateuch implies, or presupposes, a great deal of custom or usage, which was law, although it was not written. Thus Deuteronomy 16: 18, directs the appointment of judges, but gives no details as to the procedure they are to follow. Presumably such procedures were orally transmitted.<sup>15</sup>

The Midrash was established which is the interpretation of the written laws and the Mishna focused on the oral laws. The Mishna contained long established custom; it incorporated regulations or decrees of a prohibitive kind and enactments of a positive kind issued by individuals or bodies, who at different times had authority to do. It was from these two foundations of education that is the written and oral laws that the Pharisees and Sadducees were divided and later the Essenes and other sects or groups.

As a matter of fact, torah eventually became the foundation of the nation Israel’s education. They had their curriculum, schools, social life, beliefs, culture, norms, taboos, and all their knowledge about God, man and his way of life, system of government, interpersonal relationship and everything from “torah” as the foundation.

The law as agent of creation means wisdom in Proverbs 8, which was regarded as older than the world. The law was created before everything (Deut 11:10 cf. Proverbs 8:22). The law was connected with the creation; it was one of the pillars of the universe. In a real sense God himself was bound by and to the law.

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<sup>15</sup>George Arthur, The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 91.

The law originated from God and approved by Him. The universe conforms to the law; nature itself is after the pattern of it. And Jesus recommended and summed up the law into two that is expression of love to God and exhibition of love to others.

### **Conclusion**

“Torah” was Israel’s national foundation of education, which was divided into two that is the written and the oral laws. Torah must be transmitted from one generation to another. It must also be part of their lives. They must observe it while at home, on the field, walking, lying down, awoken, eating and every circumstance. It must be in their hearts and must be observed. Overruling any of the law warrants penalty of any kind.

The “Torah” analyzes the expected relationship between them and God, the priests and God, individual and others, masters and slaves, neighbours, properties, time, food, sacrifices, and so on. “Torah” stands as the culture of Israel. The teaching of the covenant binds with the law was observed daily. The laws reveal demands for the fulfillment of the covenant and penalty for disobedience that delays the fulfillment of the covenant. They established the Midrash and Mishna for thorough observation of the law. Through this arouse the sects that major on the arms of the law.

At the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, He declared His coming to fulfill the law that made his emphasis on the laws of loving God and loving others as the summary. Law was made for man and man for the glorification of God, so law serves as the medium whereby man can achieve this. Jesus Christ as the Logos of the New Testament was the Torah of the Old Testament and the foundation of Christian Education.

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